

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 052698

LIMDIS TOSEC-167

FOLLOWING REPEAT PHNOM PENH 4171 ACTION SECSTATE DTD 08 MAR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 4171

LIMDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HABIB FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, MILI, CB

SUBJ: SCHANBERG ARTICLE ON SURVIVABILITY OF CAMBODIA

REF: STATE 51386

1. I HAVE JUST READ THE SCHANBERG PIECE IN THE WIRELESS
FILE. IT AMOUNTS TO AN EDITORIAL EXPRESSING SCHANBERG'S

VIEWS ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION IN CAMBODIA. SINCE
SCHANBERG IS A REPORTER AND IS AT LEAST THEORETICALLY NOT
AUTHORIZED TO WRITE EDITORIALS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES, HE
HAS WRITTEN HIS STORY IN SUCH A FASHION THAT HIS OWN VIEWS
ARE ATTRIBUTED TO THIS EMBASSY. I SHOULD ADD THAT SCHANBERG'S
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ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IS SHARED BY A NUMBER OF THE MORE

THOUGHTFUL MEMBERS OF THE LARGE PRESS CORPS NOW IN CAMBODIA.

2. THIS EMBASSY HAS IN RECENT WEEKS BEEN BESEIGED BY REPORTERS OF ALL TYPES AND NATIONALITIES. WE HAVE TRIED TO BE COOPERATIVE IN GIVING THEM BRIEFINGS AND INTERVIEWS. THESE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ON A "DEEP-BACKGROUND" BASIS, WITH A VERY FEW EXCETPTIONS SUCH AS MY ON-CAMERA STATEMENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE TV CREWS LAST WEEK (PHNOM PNEH 3516). THIS SITUATION OF COURSE LEAVES US OPEN TO MANIPULATION AND WHAT I WOULD FRANKLY TERM UNETHICAL TREATMENT BY THE PRESS, AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE SCHANBERG ARTICLE IN QUESTION. HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THAT OUR OPEN APPROACH TO THE PRESS HAS BENEFITTED US GREATLY, BECAUSE I THINK THE PRESS REPORTING FROM PHNOM PENH COULD HAVE BEEN MUCH WORSE THAN IT HAS BEEN IF WE HAD PURSUED ANY OTHER COURSE IN OUR DEALINGS WITH THE PRESS.

3. WE HAVE NOT OF COURSE USED THE TERM "NEGOTIATED SURRENDER" BUT THIS TERM HAS BEEN USED BY JOURNALISTS HERE TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN IDEA OF THE MOST LIKELY OUT-COME IN CAMBODIA.

4. OUR BEST CURRENT ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION HERE (AND YOU MIGHT WISH TO PASS THIS ON TO SENATOR HUMPHREY OR OTHERS WHO MAKE INQUIRIES ABOUT THE SCHANBERG ARTICLE) IS THAT IF THE GKR RECEIVES THE ADDITIONAL FUNDS REQUESTED BY THE ADMINISTRATION, THAT IS, BOTH MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID IN ADEQUATE QUANTITIES, IT CAN HOLD ITS OWN AGAINST THE KC OFFENSIVE AND SURVIVE UNTIL THE END OF THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR WHICH APPROXIMATELY COINCIDES WITH THE END OF THE DRY SEASON. PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE COURSE OF EVENTS DURING THE WET SEASON TO FOLLOW ARE HAZARDOUS, BUT IT IS PROBABLY SAFE TO SAY THAT THE MILITARY BALANCE WOULD SHIFT SLIGHTLY, PERHAPS VERY SLIGHTLY, AND TEMPORARILY IN FAVOR OF THE GKR. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, A GREAT MANY "IFS" INVOLVED IN ANY PROGNOSIS. AN IMPORTANT ONE, FOR EXAMPLE, IS WHETHER THE GKR IS EVER GOING TO SUCCEED IN MOUNTING AN ADEQUATE RECRUITMENT/ CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN TO REPLACE THE VERY SEVERE LOSSES

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IT HAS SUFFERED DURING THE LAST TWO MONTHS. ANOTHER CRITICAL FACTOR, WHICH IS OF COURSE VERY DIFFICULT TO GAUGE, IS HOW LONG GKR MORALE IS GOING TO HOLD UP. WE HAVE BEEN DOING A GREAT DEAL TO SHORE UP KHMER MORALE, AND WE CONTINUE TO DO OUR BEST IN THIS AREA. BUT KHMER MORALE IS ESSENTIALLY SOMETHING BEYOND OUR ULTIMATE CONTROL, AND YET IT IS PROBABLY THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR OF ALL. WHAT OUGHT TO BE SAID TO

SENATOR HUMPHREY AND OTHER KEY LEADERS ON CAPITAL HILL IS THAT IF THE SUPPLEMENTARY ASSISTANCE REQUESTED BY THE ADMINISTRATION IS NOT FORTHCOMING, KHMER MORALE ON THIS SIDE WILL COLLAPSE, PROBABLY ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES A "SURRENDER", WHETHER "NEGOTIATED" OR OTHERWISE, IS INEVITABLE.

5. WHAT OBSERVERS SUCH AS SCHANBERG HAVE IN MIND, I BELIEVE IS THAT AT SOME POINT IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE, THE AMERICAN CONGRESS WILL WEARY OF PROVIDING THE SUPPORT THAT THIS SIDE IN THE CAMBODIAN CONFLICT NEEDS TO GIVE IT THE WILL TO CONTINUE TO FIGHT. IT IS NOT FOR ME TO JUDGE WHETHER THEIR ASSESSMENT OF CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES IS CORRECT OR NOT, BUT I COULD NOT DISAGREE WITH AN ASSESSMENT THAT WILLPOWER ON THIS SIDE OF THE CONFLICT IS WEAKENING AND ABOUT ALL THAT IS SUPPORTING IT TODAY IS THE HOPED-FOR PROSPECT OF CONTINUED AMERICAN SUPPORT.

6. A MORE DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION, CONCURRED IN BY THE COUNTRY TEAM, FOLLOWS SEPTTEL.
DEAN UNQTE INGERSOLL

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